

“A Shared Path in Life's Journey” – A Story about a Zimbabwean Depot Holder

Nina Pruyn

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Advance Africa Project
Management Sciences for Health
4301 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 400
Arlington, Virginia 22203
Telephone: 703-310-3500
www.msh.org

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By Nina A. Pruyn

She got up early this morning and prepared for the long journey. Today, Nwadziwana is accompanying Lula to the clinic. She had noticed that Lula was different lately. Nwadziwana suspected that the 13 year old from her community was pregnant, even though Lula insisted she was not. A few years ago, Nwadziwana would have simply observed the change in Lula and moved on, but now that she is a Depot Holder, it is part of her role to provide reproductive health information, counseling, and contraceptives in her community. In Lula's case, Nwadziwana may be too late to provide the contraceptives, but she can still provide support, and equip her with the knowledge and skills to protect herself from sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV/AIDS.

Nwadziwana's life has changed since her community nominated her to become a depot holder. She is now part of an extensive network of community-based distributors (CBDs) and depot holders throughout Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council CBDs have long provided family planning methods in rural communities, namely oral contraceptives and condoms. Within the new Expanded CBD Programme, depot holders have been recruited as stationary resupply agents within the communities that CBDs serve. Each CBD works with about five depot holders to ensure that supplies are available to clients when they are needed. In addition, CBDs and depot holders are trained in reproductive health, including family planning, HIV/AIDS prevention, counseling, and referral to any services that he or she cannot provide. The Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC) has implemented the Expanded CBD Programme in 16 pilot districts with technical assistance and support from Advance Africa, a USAID-funded project improving family planning, reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS services in sub-Saharan Africa.



Nwadziwana's role as a depot holder has changed her life as well as that of her community.

In the Expanded CBD Programme, there is a special focus on youth because they are especially vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and STI/HIV. In many areas, adolescents do not have adequate information and resources to assist them in making healthy life decisions. Adolescent girls are at high risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery that can lead to serious illness and death. In communities highly affected by HIV,

adolescent boys and girls who lose their parents to AIDS often must shoulder the burden of caring for ill family members and orphans. Furthermore, adolescent girls are among the population with the fastest growing rate of HIV infection. Lack of reproductive health information and safe sex negotiation skills frequently end in unwanted pregnancy and STI, including HIV/AIDS. Some young women resort to commercial sex work to earn money for food, medicine, and educational expenses.



Limited access to reproductive health information and services puts adolescent girls at high risk for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Studies show that adolescents who receive information and services are more likely to delay sexual activity and have fewer sex partners. ZNFPC's Expanded CBD Programme aims to increase the skills of CBDs and depot holders in addressing the reproductive health needs of youth. To date, over 135 CBDs and 220 depot holders have been trained to provide an expanded response to reproductive health and HIV/AIDS in their communities. Youth-friendly counseling and support activities are a critical component of training and form a cornerstone for services offered in program districts.

Across Zimbabwe, depot holders like Nwadziwana are increasing awareness of sexual and reproductive health among youth so that they can better equip themselves to lead healthy, productive lives. After Lula's pregnancy was confirmed at the clinic, Nwadziwana was able to support Lula in discussing her situation with her family and with the father of her child. Lula and the man have married, and now she is one of Nwadziwana's continuing clients. Nwadziwana feels proud that she has the knowledge and confidence, as well as the support of her community, to help friends and neighbors like Lula to live happier, healthier lives.

For further information regarding this and other Advance Africa activities in Zimbabwe, please contact Premila Bartlett at pbartlett@advanceafrica.co.zw or Uchechi Obichere at uobichere@advanceafrica.org.